VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to measure the amount of time needed to teach three online courses. The data collected across the three courses were fairly consistent and indicated that teaching courses online requires between 3 ½ and 7 hours per week. The graduate level course required 30 – 45 minutes per week longer than the introductory courses. However, the time commitment is within reasonable expectations, but unlike live courses that meet between 1 and 3 times per week, the instructor needs to be online and available to students each day. Participating in and grading the online discussions takes the greatest amount of time, however, the discussions show that the students posted 4 to 5 times as many messages as the instructor. Consequently, consistent with principles of effective instruction, students had more opportunities to respond and interact in the online courses than in live, lecture-type courses.

The data represent a glimpse at one of the numerous, complex variables that are associated with asynchronous learning. The time needed to teach online courses may vary according to factors such as content area, type and level of course, course design, and a variety of student factors such as graduate and undergraduate levels. Consequently, the study’s data may only apply to similar courses taught under similar circumstances. Furthermore, any comparisons between live and online courses are only inferred. The study did not measure the amount of time needed to teach live courses, however the 3 ½ – 7 hours per week that were devoted to teaching online seems comparable to the hours of live class time, office hours, and grading needed for live courses.

The present study represents an area of inquiry that includes numerous, complex variables. Additional studies are needed that focus on the time needed to teach a variety of courses in the myriad of disciplines found in higher education. Additional studies are also needed to determine how student characteristics, course design, and course preparation affect faculty workload.